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ABSTRACT

At the 1986 American Educational Research Association (AERA) convention, findings were presented from 14 schools that had implemented the "Reaching Success through Involvement" (RSI) strategy, which requires (1) the use of a comprehensive school assessment process; and (2) formal and informal participation of student leaders. The present paper reports findings from 21 additional schools completing RSI strategy between 1984 and 1987. The paper briefly reviews the RSI strategy and its theoretical framework, implementation results, the extent of institutionalization occurring at the schools, and factors that prohibited or enhanced implementation of the process for creating and maintaining effective schools. RSI is a systematically planned, sustained effort for school self-study and improvement focused on changing a school's culture, climate, and productivity. The system includes four sets of activities: (1) assessing organizational productivity and health; (2) planning for improvements; (3) implementing plans through groups with differing roles and responsibilities; and (4) reassessing organizational productivity and health to plan for continued improvement. Four processes are imbedded: involvement, problem-solving, identification, and monitoring. The study showed that student participation is essential, that less effective schools showed the most improvement, and that some moderately effective schools showed little improvement. The follow-up study showed mixed results for RSI institutionalization; even so, the importance of student involvement in their school's ongoing management was affirmed. Shared teacher decision-making in school affairs emerged as an important ingredient of school management. Included are 2 tables and 13 references. (MLH)

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CREATING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS-- AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REVISITED

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CREATING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS-- AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REVISITED

At the 1986 AERA convention in San Francisco the author presented a paper entitled *Reaching Success through Involvement—Implementation Strategy for Creating and Maintaining Effective Schools*. That paper presented research findings from 14 schools that had implemented the strategy known as *Reaching Success through Involvement* (Furtwengler, 1986). Two key features of RSI, as it is called for short, are (1) the use of a comprehensive school assessment process and (2) the participation of formal and informal student leaders.

The purpose of this paper is to report findings from 21 additional schools that have recently completed similar RSI implementations. The paper will review briefly the RSI strategy and its theoretical framework, the results of those 21 implementations, the extent to which institutionalization of the process occurred in these schools, and factors which prohibited or enhanced the implementation of the process for creating and maintaining effective schools. The paper will conclude with (1) suggestions for increasing the probability of successful institutionalization of the process and (2) descriptions of projects underway to determine the effects of co-implementations of the process at the school, district, and state department levels.

Essence of the RSI Strategy and Its Theoretical Framework

RSI is defined as a systematically planned and sustained effort for school self-study and improvement that focuses explicitly on changing the culture, climate, and productivity of the school. Culture is defined in this context as "the way we do things around here," and climate is defined as the way people *feel* about the "way we do things around here." RSI was designed to alter the culture and climate of schools in ways that improve the organization's productivity and health.

Implementation of RSI includes four sets of activities: (1) assessing the organization's productivity and health, (2) planning for improvements, (3) implementing plans through groups having different roles and responsibilities, and (4) re-assessing the organization's productivity and health to plan for continued improvement. These four sets of activities are subdivided into a set of twelve steps. Each step is described here in the sequence in which it usually occurred in the schools.

Steps 1 through 5 were completed during the first school year of implementation.

1. The building administrators recognized and accepted their responsibility for their school's overall level of effectiveness.
2. Each principal appointed a planning council of teachers to guide the implementation process. The planning council, with help from outside consultants, collected and analyzed information about the status of the school and recorded the results on the RSI School Report Card. The consultants and council prepared a report on the findings.
3. The planning council presented the report to the rest of the faculty, along with its recommendations and plans for action.
4. In secondary and middle grade schools, the council used recommendations received from teachers, students, administrators, and parents to establish a student formal and informal leadership group of 50 to 100 students. Frequently, planning councils selected formal and informal community leaders to attend the retreats.
5. The council and several members of the student leadership group planned a two- or three-day retreat focusing on leadership training and school problem-solving activities.

Steps 6 and 7 occurred during August or September of the second year.

6. The planning council, a few members from the community, and the entire student leadership group took part in a retreat.
7. During the retreat, the participants formed a school leadership team which divided, according to members' interest, into several action teams charged with addressing specific school problems. Planning councils at elementary schools held faculty retreats and/or faculty-student retreats that included students from the fourth grade and up.

Steps 8 through 12 were completed during the school year following the retreat.

8. Action teams met throughout the year to work on their respective areas of responsibility. An executive committee of the school lead-

ership team held regular meetings to establish agendas for several half-day meetings of the action teams.

9. Members of the planning council planned inservice training to meet the needs of the faculty.
10. As the school year progressed, changes in the school's effectiveness were documented. Special celebrations were established to recognize progress.
11. Prior to the end of the year, a second RSI School Report Card was developed and the planning council used the data from the report card to prepare a report and recommendations that were presented to the entire faculty. Step 11 essentially repeated steps 2 and 3.
12. The planning council established a procedure for electing or appointing new members to the council each year. The new planning council completed plans for the second retreat to be held in August or September. This step repeated the functions of steps 4 and 5.

The twelve steps in the change strategy are standard with three important exceptions. First, one or more consultants working with the 21 schools collected and analyzed information from a variety of sources. Second, the analysis of the school's level of effectiveness included an assessment of the culture and climate of the school. Third, the involvement of students in the change process was seen as essential. Both formal and informal student leaders participated in the schoolwide change efforts (Furtwengler, 1986).

The involvement of students tended to be concentrated in three areas. First, students participated in training that was designed to help them understand leadership and organizations. Second, students helped to identify school problems from their perspective and proposed solutions. Third, students were active on action teams that implemented plans to correct or reduce those problems. The annual retreat proved to be the most effective vehicle for fostering students' involvement in the change process (Furtwengler, 1987).

The RSI framework for implementing change to improve schools is based on the nature of organizational culture and organizational change as described by Deal (1987), Sergiovanni (1987), Morgan (1986), Fullan (1982), Schien (1986), and Purkey and Smith (1983). Embedded in the four sets of activities of assessing the status of the school, planning for its improvement, implementing plans, and reassessing the status is a framework which consists of four processes. These processes are: (1) the *involvement process*,

which is directing the active attention of formal and informal leaders (teachers, students, administrators, and a few community members) toward the school's aims and activities; (2) the *problem-solving process*, which is the active involvement of the above personnel in identifying and proposing solutions to school problems; (3) the *identification process*, which is the changing of personal boundaries, roles, and areas of responsibility to assume new roles and shared responsibilities for implementing solutions to school problems; and (4) the *monitoring process*, which is the systematic collecting of data regarding the effectiveness of actions designed to improve the effectiveness of the school.

The RSI process was designed to help teachers, students, administrators, and parents create and update their shared realities. It also was designed to increase the students' sense of personal and collective responsibility for achieving the goals and aims of their school. The numerous assumptions and conditions for implementation associated with the RSI strategy are described in detail in previous publications (Furtwengler, 1985; 1986).

RSI Implementation Results in 21 Schools

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of research were used to conduct research on the results of RSI implementations. Data collection using these methods occurred twice over a period of two years and at approximately the same time each school year. The quantitative methods included determining the raw and adjusted scores on a series of instruments designed to assess constructs relative to school climate and culture of the school. Data sources included teachers, administrators, students, and parents of students at each of 21 schools. Each set of scores was compared with those of other schools having similar demographic characteristics. Inappropriate student behaviors and student achievement data in each school also were compared with similar data from those comparable schools. Office records served as sources of data for inappropriate student behavior and student achievement.

The qualitative methods included structured interviews with teachers and students and observations of student and faculty behaviors at the schools. Trained facilitators were used to record interviewee responses and to record observations of students and faculty members at each school. Data were assembled on each school and compared with norms from other schools similar to the school under consideration. At least three trained facilitators familiar with the constructs reviewed the data for each school; the facilitators then met to determine a consensus rating for each of nine factors at each school. A four-unit effectiveness rating scale was used to assess two learning productivity constructs, six school culture constructs, and one school climate construct. On this rating scale, a four-star rating indicated a school component that was judged to be excellent or similar to one found in the best schools in the country. A one-star rating signified a school component that

needed immediate improvement and for which little effort toward betterment was found. Each set of ten ratings was reviewed by the school's planning council of 8 to 10 members to validate the extent to which they believed the ratings represented their school.

The two constructs of learning productivity are academic achievement and socialized behavior. These components are defined as follows:

Academic Achievement is the knowledge students have, their skills in processing information, their performance in applying what they know in problem-solving situations, and their attitudes toward learning.

Socialized Behavior is the students' exhibition of social behaviors which meet the standards for responsible behavior by students in their community.

School culture, simply stated, is "the way we do things around here." Shared social agreements among school personnel and students determine the culture of the school. Six components that comprise any school's culture are identified in the following descriptions (Upton, 1986).

Structure and Order is the smoothness with which school policies, procedures, and management roles and responsibilities are implemented in the school. This category of culture is composed of five subcategories: Environmental Support, Consistency, School Operations, Role Clarity, and Discipline.

Social Acceptance is the presence among most individuals of a sense of belonging to the organization.

Mission and Vision is the reasons for being and doing and the long-term goals of what the school is to become.

Academic Emphasis is the general and continuous support for the teaching/learning activities in the school.

Problem-Solving is the systematic identification and resolution of problems in the school and the involvement of staff and students in these processes.

Cultural and Symbolic Management is the communication of the school's mission and vision that emphasizes teaching and learning and an ongoing process to monitor progress and implement changes as needed

to achieve school aims.

School Climate is part of the social milieu and is defined as the way teachers, administrators, and students feel about what they have agreed--explicitly and implicitly--to do in the school.

Multiple measures were used in making the rating for each construct and in developing the narrative which accompanied each school report card. The status of the school was determined twice during each RSI implementation: one assessment was made during the early phases; a second assessment was made near the conclusion.

In this study of 21 schools, each school had completed an RSI implementation during a period from 1984 to 1987. The schools were located in one southern state, one midwestern state, and one northeastern state. The demographic characteristics of the schools ranged from inner-city schools in low socio-economic settings to suburban schools with predominantly white middle- and upper-class populations. Sixteen were high schools, two were elementary schools, and the remaining five were junior high schools.

A composite of the changes in the school report card ratings for all 21 schools is shown in Table 1. The numbers shown there indicate the rating changes which occurred during implementation of the RSI strategy in terms of the four-star rating system. A "1" indicates that the rating for that particular component improved by one star, while a "-1" indicates that the component's rating dropped by one star. A "0" indicates that no change occurred in the component's rating between the first and second assessments. In Table 1, the schools are arranged in three groupings based on the initial rating of each school's overall effectiveness. Although seven schools appear in each the three school effectiveness categories, the distribution was a chance occurrence rather than an intentional selection of seven for each of the categories. There were no apparent relationships between the demographics of the schools and the categories of school effectiveness.

As Table 1 shows, the 21 schools varied in their level of improvement and in the components in which improvement occurred. Schools that were classified as less effective--one- or two-star ratings for most components--showed the greatest improvement. Schools A, B, C, and D demonstrate this point. These schools, in fact, had become moderately effective schools by the time the second assessment was completed.

The findings for these 21 schools appear to be consistent with those reported for 14 other schools in the 1986 study. The major findings from the RSI implementations in the 21 schools are these:

TABLE 1
Rating Changes Between Two Assessments for 21 Schools

School	Less Effective							Moderately Effective							Effective						
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
Ach.	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	na	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SB	2	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
S/O	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	0
SA	0	2	2	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
M/V	0	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
AE	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PS	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
C/SM	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
SC	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Key: Ach.= Achievement; SB= Social Behavior; S/O= Structure and Order; SA= Social Acceptance; M/V= Mission and Vision; AE= Academic Emphasis; PS= Problem-Solving; C/SM= Cultural and Symbolic Management; SC= Climate.

One, students, especially at the secondary level, need to be involved as members of the organization when attempts are made to create or maintain an effective school.

Two, educators can be trained to implement the RSI strategy, but the nature of the relationship and attachment between the facilitator and the school needs to be examined. Four schools had to change facilitators approximately half-way through their implementations. These four schools, F, J, L, and R showed less progress than many of the other schools. Personnel at these schools complained about the difficulty of orienting the new facilitator to the unique aspects of their school. They also stated that the second RSI facilitator was not as "good" as the previous one. This finding suggests that the training of the facilitators needs to be refined and/or the process used to change facilitators needs to be altered.

Three, the six broad categories of school problems emerged repeatedly during use of the implementation strategy. Retreat groups identified problems associated with academic achievement, human relations, school spirit and pride, building and grounds, school image, and student involvement in school affairs.

Four, the process of changing school culture and climate takes time that schools find hard to provide. Throughout the implementations it was difficult to schedule the time that the teacher-student action teams needed to accomplish their work toward improving their schools.

Five, in less effective schools, the faculty's primary interest was survival. In such schools, it took at least six months for faculty members to feel secure enough to involve students in combined faculty-student, problem-solving sessions.

Six, the lack of significant improvement by some of the moderately effective schools was unexpected. Reasons for this outcome may be found in data collected through the follow-up study that is reported next.

Institutionalization of RSI in 21 Schools

This follow-up study of RSI implementations in 21 schools was conducted for two purposes: 1) to determine the extent to which institutionalization of the RSI process had occurred, and 2) to identify factors which prohibited or enhanced the implementation and continued use of the RSI strategy. Criteria were established for selecting schools for this follow-up study. To qualify, schools must have completed a formal implementation of the RSI strategy before the spring of 1987 and not more than three years prior to that time. Twenty-one schools met these criteria and were selected for the study.

The method of data collection for the follow-up study was limited to interviews with the principals of each of the 21 schools. A structured interview format was created and the questions were developed and revised after a pilot test. Pilot testing was used to determine the appropriate order of the questions and the extent to which the questions prompted interviewees to provide information regarding the degree of institutionalization of the RSI process. A senior research assistant trained in interviewing solicited responses from each of the principals.

Three criteria were established for determining the extent to which the process had been institutionalized. None of the schools met these criteria prior to the RSI implementations. First, did the school continue to make annual assessments of productivity and organizational health after the RSI implementation? Second, did the school continue to have leadership retreats involving students and/or faculty? Third, did the school continue to maintain or increase the level of student involvement in groups responsible for defining school aims or for helping the school achieve its aims? The RSI strategy was declared to be institutionalized when the interview data affirmed all three conditions. A partial institutionalization occurred when two of the three conditions were present in a school.

Table 2 shows the extent to which each of the 21 schools met the criteria for institutionalization. One-third of the schools continued to have a form of the annual assessment and retreat. Eighteen schools continued to involve students in helping to manage the school. Seven schools met the criteria for full institutionalization, while eight more schools institutionalized part of the RSI strategy. Six of the schools that reported institutionalizing the strategy had been initially categorized as being either less effective

TABLE 2
Institutionalization of the RSI Strategy

	Less Effective							Moderately Effective							Effective						
School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
ASM	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
RET	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
INV	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

Key: ASM= Annual Assessment; RET= Retreat; INV= Student Involvement; Y= Yes; N= No.

schools or moderately effective schools. Four of the six schools which did fully or partially not institutionalize the strategy had been categorized as effective schools. These four administrators joined seven others in attributing their failure to continue retreats to the lack of financial support from the school system.

Over half of the schools reported having strong support from the superintendent of schools and the central office for the implementation of the change strategy. Six of the seven that had institutionalized the process reported that they had strong central office administrative support. At three of these schools--one in the northeast, one in the midwest and one in the south--the superintendent of schools attended the school retreat and was active in the process of helping the action teams and planning councils at each school continue the RSI strategy after the initial implementation was completed.

Two principals reported that they continued with a form of annual assessment and student involvement, but that they no longer had retreats. They stated that they had continued with retreats the first two years after completing the RSI implementation. Eighteen of the 21 principals reported a desire to continue with the annual assessment and student-faculty retreats. Those that had not done so stated that the lack of central office support and the lack of financial resources were the primary reasons they were unable to continue the assessments and retreats.

The surprising finding was the continued level of student involvement in the ongoing management of the school. Eighteen schools gave specific examples of how students continued to be involved on action teams to improve the school. Before the RSI implementations were begun, only two principals were strong advocates of using students in a shared decision-making process. In this follow-up study, 14 principals appeared to be strong advocates for such student involvement.

Discussion of Findings

Three findings from the follow-up study warrant further discussion. These findings are related to: 1) the level of effectiveness of schools that institutionalized the strategy, 2) the role of external support for the RSI implementations, and 3) the change in the schools' philosophy regarding the roles and responsibilities of students for school productivity and organizational health.

It is interesting to note that the schools which benefitted the most from the implementations, namely the less and moderately effective schools, showed more institutionalization than did the effective schools. School B is a noticeable exception to this pattern of improvement, but the school changed principals a year after the RSI implementation. The general pattern suggests support for the assertion that institutionalization is influenced by the extent to which the innovation is perceived as solving the user's problems.

Research on school improvement (Liebrman, 1986; Baldrige & Deal, 1975; Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984) has identified a number of factors and conditions that may affect institutionalization of an innovation in educational organizations. Based on the principals' interview data, it appears as though at least half of the schools did not have strong school system support. This study has reaffirmed the finding that support for school improvement must come from both the school unit and the district's central administration.

The nature of the support from outside the school may be an important factor that influences the institutionalization process. It is impossible to conclude from this study the precise nature of the support needed by schools, but one can speculate that it may be necessary for some personnel from the central office to develop a shared reality of the plans and visions for a school. It may be necessary for: 1) central office personnel to participate in the change process at the school level, and/or 2) the central office to undertake a similar change process during the time the school is implementing its change strategy. The simultaneous development of shared school and district realities and visions may improve the frequency of institutionalization at both the school and district level.

Support for the RSI strategy at the school system level might be improved through a longer or more intensive orientation and training session for central office personnel. The orientation provided to the central office personnel in this study was limited to a half-day session for leadership personnel and, in some instances, to an interview with the superintendent of schools. Members of the board of education were informed of the program through the central office staff. In the future, those implementing the RSI strategy need to build support for the effort within the central office and board of education. Institutionalization likely will be enhanced by such support. The data suggest that implementing RSI without strong central office support is more like a risk venture than an investment.

The most significant finding of this study may be that teachers and administrators change their perspectives of students as resources to help with the process of schooling. It appears as though the fundamental framework (i.e., involving students and teachers, identifying school problems and options to solve those problems, assuming different roles and responsibilities, and monitoring action plans) continues to be implemented by most schools. If institutionalization were defined as the continued implementation of the framework, then the conclusions from this study might claim even greater success. Since the intent of the RSI strategy was to help schools improve through the use of a structured process, institutionalization was defined within that narrow perspective.

If students are viewed as potential contributors for helping to solve school problems, then it is not difficult to speculate as to what may happen to the effectiveness of these schools. They should continue to improve. From observations of more than 60 implementations of the RSI strategy, it appears as though the students' and teachers' perceptions of control increase as they work with action teams. As their locus of control over their environment increases, their sense of ownership of the school and its performance increases. It also appears that their personal sense of "felt" responsibility for their school increases and their own performance as a part of the school improves. Additional quantitative research is needed to verify these observations of this phenomena.

Since the information collected for the follow-up study was limited to interview data from principals, it is important that another study be initiated to review the on-site practices of the schools which reported high levels of student involvement in decision-making. This study should focus on identifying the extent of the students' involvement and the nature of the problems which they appear to be effective in addressing.

The RSI strategy provides for community involvement, but in many RSI implementations only a few community members became involved. Those citizens who did work on action teams consistently provided strong support and served as a communication link to the community. This aspect of the RSI strategy needs to be reviewed to determine how and when to assure the involvement of more community members in the process.

Research (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984) suggests that innovations to be adopted must have the potential for being adapted to fit a variety of different school settings. The activities associated with the RSI strategy may be too expensive and provide too much structure with too little flexibility to be adapted exactly as the activities are designed. But this somewhat overstructured strategy may be necessary to engender a school's adoption of the basic framework. If the RSI strategy leads to improvements in schools and to changes in their culture regarding shared decision-making, then RSI implementations should continue in still more schools. The search for alternative models and activities, however, should also continue--especially for those -

which lead to institutionalization of the basic framework while reducing the financial burden on the schools.

New Applications and the RSI Strategy

Two pilot RSI implementations are being studied to determine the effects of implementing the strategy at the school district level and the state department of education level. One school system is implementing the RSI strategy at the district level and implementing the strategy in its schools simultaneously. At the school system level, a districtwide report card is being constructed to show the district's overall learning productivity and its components of culture and climate. The organizational health ratings are a reflection of the culture and climate of the central office support staff and building and district administrators. Teachers rather than students serve on action teams to help solve systemwide problems.

In the division of instruction at one state department of education, sixty administrators and staff members are implementing the RSI strategy, but have re-labeled it "solving problems collaboratively." This group has received a comprehensive division report card and held a retreat. At the retreat, each member of the division volunteered to serve on one or more action teams. The constituency of each action team is varied to include secretaries, staff assistants, section chiefs, and branch chiefs. The planning council consists of representatives from all levels within the department; it guides the action teams and serves as an accountability agent for the teams. The culture in the division is changing from one of ignoring organizational problems to one of solving those problems as members of teams.

One purpose for this project is to eventually broaden the role of division specialists to include helping schools to improve their overall effectiveness. Many specialists in the division are considering problems and solutions in the context of the division as an organization. This is a new role for many. Will their participation in the implementation of the RSI strategy at the division level help them form a school improvement perspective? With external assistance from the author, the division will eventually implement the "solving problems collaboratively" model (or RSI strategy) in several school districts and individual schools. Several specialists will serve as RSI interns in these implementations. Their progress will be closely monitored to determine the extent to which their progress is aided by their participation in the RSI experience at the division level. Their progress will be compared to the progress of other facilitators trained without the benefit of having experienced an implementation.

In summary, this study suggests that the RSI strategy for school improvement may be a promising strategy for improving less effective and moderately effective schools. The RSI strategy also appears to lead schools to institutionalize a framework for shared student-teacher decision making in school affairs.

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